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Introduction

A major problem of our time is an epidemic of low self-esteem expressed in the form of self-doubt and self-hate. A sense of being without worth lies at the root of almost all our personal, moral and spiritual problems. Our actions, feelings and even abilities are consistent with this self-image. We act like the person we perceive ourselves to be. Our self-image is the key to our development and behavior—setting boundaries of our individual accomplishments. Many of our past and present problems stem from a low self-esteem. The good news is that, with God's instructions and enablement, our mental blueprint can be redrawn.

What are some of the basic problems that come from low self-esteem?

- Insecurity—A sense of worthlessness fosters insecurity and hopelessness.
- Jealousy—Doubting our own worth, we're jealous of those who appear better off than us.
- Anger—Comparing ourselves with others, we can become angry and resentful.
- Fear—We have hidden fears that others may discover how we really feel about our true selves.
- Selfishness—A lack of self-esteem produces total absorption in meeting our own needs.
- Guilt—By focusing on failure rather than forgiveness, we are defeated and feel guilty.

Did you know that some of the most powerful weapons of Satan are psychological?

Fear is one. Doubt in another. Anger, hostility, worry and, of course, guilt top the list. Long standing guilt is hard to shake for some. An uneasy sense of self-condemnation seems to hang like a fog over too many Christians. Perhaps one of the most deadly weapons in Satan's arsenal is low-self esteem since it has such a pervasive effect on every aspect of our lives. We're talking about a gut level feeling of inferiority, a sense of personal inadequacy and a lack of self-worth.

There are four ways that Satan uses this devastating psychological weapon: low self-esteem:

1. Low self-esteem paralyzes our potential.

Low self-esteem results in a tragic loss of human potential, watered down living, wasted gifts and broken dreams. According to Dr. James Dobson, low self-esteem is a key contributor to depression, especially among women. According to Dobson's study, 51% of the Christian women surveyed rated low self-esteem as the chief contributor.

According to Jesus in the parable of the talents, the man with one talent was immobilized by fear and feelings of inadequacy and he tried to play it safe by burying his talent in the ground.

His life was a frozen asset. He did exactly what a lot of people with low self-esteem do—nothing. That's exactly what Satan wants us to do.

2. Low self-esteem destroys our dreams.

We can't live in our dreams or on our dreams but we can live by them. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Low self-esteem will destroy any hope of realizing God's great plan for our life. We all need the hope of a better tomorrow. "*Hope deferred makes the heart sick.*" We may be able to exist without hope but we cannot live as God intends without it.

If you don't think you can, you can't. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the Promised Land that God had promised was ready but the people were not because of their low self-esteem that had translated into a lack of faith. They forgot who they were because they forgot whose they were. Expecting great things from God and attempting great things for Him can be destroyed by low self-esteem.

3. Low self-esteem ruins our relationships.

Low self-esteem can keep us from believing that God really loves and cares about us. Such thinking leads to inner questions and resentments which can seriously undermine our relationship with God. **If we don't really believe that God wants the best for us, how can we really trust Him?** We become critical of God's design and begin to resent the Designer. Our perception of God becomes contaminated by our misperception of ourselves. One of the most common ways of dealing with feelings of low self-esteem is withdrawing from our relationships with others. If we don't love ourselves, how can we love our neighbor? Low self-esteem wrecks interpersonal relationships more than anything else that I know. Here again, **Satan has us just where he wants us—isolated from God and others.**

4. Low self-esteem sabotages our ministry.

If low self-esteem results in isolation from others, how can the Body of Christ function in a healthy manner? If the members of Christ's body are not functioning as members of the body then Christ's ministry is hindered. Pastors hear more excuses for members not doing God's work than you can imagine and many of the excuses center around feelings of low self-esteem. "I'm not good enough for this... I'm not good enough for that." Low self-esteem robs God of the marvelous opportunity for Him to show His strength through ordinary people like you and me. **Nothing sabotages Christian service more than thinking so little of your self; God isn't even given a chance.**

What are the different terms related to the self and what do they mean?

- **Self-image** is much like a self-portrait—what you picture yourself to be—it includes how you think and feel.
- **Self-esteem** is how you feel deep down about yourself. It is usually based on how others regard you.
- **Self-concept** is the person one conceives oneself to be based on what God or others think about you.
- **Self-worth**—one's sense of worth will be based on one's appearance, performance and approval.

- **Self-respect**—proper regard or respect for oneself based upon conformity to accepted moral standards.

How important is it to have a healthy self-concept?

How you see yourself and how you feel about yourself will affect just about every aspect of your life. You will probably think, speak, act and react as the person you think you are. The writer of Proverbs says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." The real you is the person God sees, not the image you project (Prov. 23:7). The truth is—you will never rise above the image you have of yourself in your own mind. In developing a healthy self-image, we must base our self-image on what God's Word says about us, rather than the false, fickle standards of society.

What are the three essential components of a healthy self-image?

1. Affection—A sense of belongingness, of being wanted, accepted, cared for, enjoyed, and loved.
2. Acceptance—A sense of worth and value—an inner feeling that I count, I'm valued, I have something to offer.
3. Approval—A sense of being competent—confident that I can perform a task, meet a challenge, cope with life.

What are the primary sources of our self-image?

There are four factors that help us construct our self-image:

1. The outer world (Social) includes all the external factors that have gone into your makeup—parentage, upbringing, how you were trained, treated, loved and cared for, a reflection of the reactions of the important people in your life and all your life experiences up to the present.
2. The inner world (Psychological) —this includes the mental and emotional equipment we need to cope with life. It includes our senses, our nerves, our capacity to learn, register and respond. This also includes the fact that every human being has a sinful, selfish human nature which affects everything that we do.
3. Satan and his cunning wiles use our low self-esteem as weapons against us. He uses inferiority, inadequacy and self-belittling to defeat Christians and prevent them from realizing their full potential as God's children. He has the ability to put thoughts in our minds that do not originate with us.
4. God and His truthful Word is the key to straightening out our false beliefs about ourselves. God is the key to moving from the problem of low self-esteem toward a positive self-concept. He is the key for turning away from the disease to the cure of the disease of low self-esteem.

Do we have faulty theology that we need to change? If so, how?

We cannot think wrongly and live rightly. We cannot believe error and practice truth. Part of our problem as Christians is that many of us have a misunderstanding of the nature of humility. Self-belittling and/or self-condemnation is not Christian humility and runs counter to the basic teachings of the Christian faith.

The two great commandments involve three commands: love God, yourself, and others. Proper self-love provides the basis for proper love for our neighbor. The Bible does not say love your neighbor but hate yourself. It says, love your neighbor as you love yourselves. Self-negation is not part of biblical humility, neither is self-condemnation. It is impossible to be selfish and have a healthy self-concept. We are to submit ourselves to God and offer ourselves as living sacrifices so that we might be spiritually transformed, that is, more conformed to the image of Christ.

How do we develop a proper estimate of ourselves?

Christians are called to develop the picture of their worth and value from God, not from others. The healing of our low self-esteem hinges on the choice we must all make: Will we listen to the world, the flesh and the devil or will we listen to God in His Word? Consider the following questions:

1. What right do I have to criticize one who God loves so deeply? (Rom. 5:8)
2. What right do I have to criticize one whom God honored so highly? (1 Jn. 3:1-2)
3. What right do I have to criticize one whom God values so highly? (Rom. 5:7-8, 11)
4. What right do I have to criticize one whom God has provided for so fully? (Phil. 4:19)
5. What right do I have to criticize one whom God has planned for so carefully? (Eph. 1:3-5)
6. What right do I have to criticize one whom God delights in? (Eph. 1:6)
7. What right do I have to criticize one whom God does not condemn? (Rom. 8:1)

What are the two biggest lies we believe that contribute to low self-esteem?

The first lie is that we can have sense of personal worth apart from establishing a personal relationship with God. The unregenerate person is deceived into thinking that one need not be saved or that salvation is by works and that salvation can be put off to some later day. All the world religions except Christianity believe in a works based faith and they are all deceived. God's word teaches that salvation is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9).

The second lie involves regenerate people failing to understand, accept and affirm who they are in Christ. The regenerate people are most frequently deceived by thinking of themselves in terms of their old nature (Rom. 8:5-14) rather than their new nature—failing to realize who they are in Christ. How can anyone feel good about being a slave of sin as a result of having a sinful nature?

Consider this analogy: When an individual has poor self-esteem due to an ugly appearance and then has plastic surgery and looks great, that surgery does not necessarily or automatically improve that person's self-esteem. In a similar way, when an unbeliever becomes a new creature in Christ, that conversion experience does not help his self-concept if he still thinks that the real person is his sinful nature instead of his new one (2 Cor. 5:17).

What is the key to developing a healthy self-concept?

Personal worth is a gift of God. It is not earned or achieved, cannot be added to or taken from, need not be proved and must not be denied. We do nothing to qualify for it. It is ours at birth. As with any gift, it must be accepted, consciously with thanksgiving.

What is the biblical basis for establishing our self-worth?

Consider the following facts:

- **God created me**—in His image as a unique person. His creation gives me worth. (Gen. 1:27)
- **God loves me**—God is a loving heavenly Father. His love gives me a sense of belonging. (Jer. 31:3)
- **God planned for me**—God wants my heart to be His throne. His plan gives me significance. (Psa. 139:16)
- **God gifted me**—God gave me natural abilities and spiritual gifts. His gifts give me competence. (Eph. 4:7)
- **God's Son died for me**—Jesus died on the cross for my sins. His death makes me acceptable. (2 Cor. 5:16-18)

The above facts establish my permanent worth. What God accomplished can't be changed. To deny these facts is tantamount to calling God a liar and is a refined form of blasphemy. Because God has accepted me, I can act with confidence because of who I am, not to prove who I am.

What is our new position in Christ?

If you don't fully understand your identity and position in Christ, you will see very little difference between yourself and non-Christians. Some Christians think that they are just a sinner whose sins are forgiven trying to hang on until Christ returns. They think that having their sins forgiven is the only thing that happened at salvation and that they are still the same person they were before.

Peter says that we have become "*a partaker of the divine nature*" (2 Pet. 1:4). A born again believer is no longer "*in the flesh*" but "*in Christ*." Paul said in Ephesians 5:8, "*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*" Second Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" Romans 6:6, "*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*" Galatians 2:20, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" We must believe and live in harmony with the truth that we are eternally different in Christ. It's not what we do that determines who we are. It's who we are that determines what we do.

What are some of the implications of God's truth concerning our self-concept?

- My past—forget it! God is more interested in where we are going than where we have been. (Phil. 3:13)

- My present—thank God for it! I will thank God in all circumstances for all things. (Eph. 5:20)
- My potential—discover it! My potential is God’s gift to me. What I make of it is my gift to Him. (1 Tim. 4:14-15)
- My performance—affirm it! I will give God the credit for all He enables me to do. (2 Tim. 4: 7)
- My possessions—share them! The poorest person has something to give that riches cannot buy. (Matt. 10:8)

What are some practical suggestions for developing a healthy self-image?

1. Hate your sin (nature) but never hate your true self (new nature).
2. Be quick to repent and maintain a good attitude—cultivate the mind of Christ
3. When God gives you light, walk in it—revelation always demands a response.
4. Eliminate negative thoughts patterns about yourself; don’t condemn yourself.
5. Honestly admit your shortcomings without blaming yourself for everything.
6. Center your thoughts on Christ and think about others rather than yourself.
7. Take good care of yourself physically without obsessing over your appearance.
8. Be a life long student without letting your knowledge puff you up with pride.
9. Thank God for the way He has gifted you without looking down on others.
10. Don’t despise your weaknesses; they keep you dependent on God.

How can we apply these Scriptural truths to our life and circumstances?

1. If you are regenerate, the real you is your new and not your old nature. (2 Cor. 5:17)
2. In Romans 6:3-10, Paul instructs us to **know** the basic facts about who we are in Christ.
3. In Romans 6:11, we are to **consider** ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.
4. In Romans 6:12-13, we are to **present** ourselves as instruments of righteousness to God.
5. In Romans 6:15-18, we are to present ourselves as servants who **obey** God from the heart.

6. Our goal is to honor Christ by representing Him in every thought, action, relationship and conversation.

7. We need to devote the rest of our lives to understanding and experiencing God's truth in our lives.

Realize that you are deeply loved, completely forgiven, fully pleasing, totally accepted, and complete in Christ because of what He has done on your behalf. You are free! Free to "*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9).

WHO I AM IN CHRIST

I am accepted...

I am God's child. (Jn. 1:12)

As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ. (Jn. 15:15)

I have been justified. (Rom. 5:1)

I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit. (1 Cor. 6:17)

I have been bought with a price and I belong to God. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

I am a member of Christ's body. (1 Cor. 12:27)

I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child. (Eph. 1:3-8)

I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. (Col. 1:13-14)

I am complete in Christ. (Col. 2:9-10)

I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ. (Heb. 4:14-16)

I am secure...

I am free from condemnation. (Rom. 8:1-2)

I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances. (Rom. 8:28)

I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God. (Rom. 8:31-39)

I have been established, anointed and sealed by God. (2 Cor. 1:21-22)

I am hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-4)

I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me. (Phil. 1:6)

I am a citizen of heaven. (Phil. 3:20)

I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7)

I am born of God, and the evil one cannot harm me [beyond what God may allow]. (1 Jn. 5:18)

I am significant...

I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life. (Jn. 15:5)

I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit. (Jn. 15:16)

I am God's temple. (1 Cor. 3:16)

I am a minister of reconciliation for God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm. (Eph. 2:6)

I am God's workmanship. (Eph. 2:10)

I may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Eph. 3:12)

I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13)

(Credit for this list goes to Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, pp. 43-45)